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ABSTRACT

This paper describes two culturally-sensitive longitudinal studies of normal development of Puerto Rican adolescents and children growing up in the United States. A number of areas pertinent to Puerto Ricans and other minorities that have previously been neglected are studied. Both projects are grounded in a cultural-ecological approach in which the child was examined in a family and neighborhood context. Neither study has been completed, but their methodology is described to provide examples of culturally sensitive research. The adolescent study will follow 150 Puerto Rican boys and 150 Puerto Rican girls and their primary caretakers for 3 years, focusing on 100 children from welfare recipient families, 100 from working class families, and 100 from middle class families. The study will center on self-identity formation and the transformation of parental ties. Interviews with subjects and their families and ethnographic study of the school and community will provide study data. The study of school aged children will be a 5-year project focusing on 150 boys and 150 girls of Puerto Rican origin in grades 1,2, and 3 from 3 social classes. Both studies will be conducted by multidisciplinary teams composed primarily of Hispanics. Both will focus on positive and negative coping skills, and both will explore issues pertinent to minorities, such as acculturation, color, and effects of migration. (Contains 25 references.) (SLD)

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AN APPROACH TO ENGAGING IN CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE RESEARCH ON PUERTO RICAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Engaging in Culturally-Sensitive Research on Puerto Rican Youth

This paper describes two culturally-sensitive longitudinal studies of normal development of Puerto Rican Adolescents and Children growing up in the USA. Areas which are pertinent to Puerto Ricans and other minorities and have previously been neglected, are studied. Examples are: self and ethnic identity formation and the effects of acculturation, color, prejudice, racism and migration on health and development.

Our goal is to describe two research projects as examples of culturally-sensitive research on Latino populations. We will describe the significance and specific aims of the studies, the conceptual frameworks, methodologies, instrument development, results to date and contributions to understanding the health and development of Puerto Rican children and adolescents growing up in the mainland USA.

One of our projects is a longitudinal study of socio-emotional development among Puerto Rican adolescents on the mainland; the other is a longitudinal study of the health and growth of Puerto Rican school-aged children on the mainland. The projects have been designed to provide information which can be used to devise policy and advocacy programs based on a normative profile rather than a deficit model of Puerto Rican youth.

Components of growth and development to be examined in the two projects include physical health, self-esteem, identity formation (including ethnic identity), school performance and behavioral adjustment (mental health). In the case of adolescents, transforming parental ties and risk taking behaviors will also be examined.

Many aspects of the studies are unique. They are longitudinal studies based on a cultural ecological approach carried out by a multidisciplinary team of researchers, the majority of whom are Hispanic. They explore the impact of the availability and use of health care and community resources, socioeconomic level, racism, migration, prejudice, discrimination, and skin color on the development of 300 Puerto Rican children and 300 Puerto Rican adolescents growing up in the mainland USA. They also entail the validation of some standard measures for use with a Puerto Rican population, major adaptation of some existing instruments (acculturation and family functioning measures), and the creation of three new instruments -- perceived discrimination, children's subjective sense of their color, and receptivity of the social environment to Puerto Ricans.

Background

The need for research on the healthy development of Puerto Rican youth grows out of the following observations: the dearth of knowledge about Hispanics in general and particularly, Puerto Ricans; the scarcity of research that does not lump together all Spanish-speaking subgroups; the lack of information of variations within the different subgroups; and the fact that Hispanics have mostly been studied from a deficit model and targeted as a high risk population without really knowing who they are and what their normal and healthy development is.

First, despite the fact that Hispanics are projected to become the largest minority in the twenty-first century and that Puerto Ricans are the second largest Spanish-speaking group (U.S. Bureau of Census 1988, Johnson and Packer, 1987), we have no systematic information about the healthy development of children and adolescents living in the mainland.

The second observation is that existing and meager information on Hispanics lumps together white collar Cubans, Central American refugees, Mexican migrant workers and Puerto Ricans, many of whom are originally from rural areas. Researchers who have compared different Hispanic subgroups have found large variations in marital status, sexual attitudes, fertility patterns, health status and utilization of health facilities (see for example, Castro, 1988; Darabi, 1987; Schur, Bernstein, & Minkler, 1987). Puerto Ricans have been relatively neglected as a focus of research, even though they have the unique status of being native born Americans who are immigrants because of culture and geography, not legal status. Having no restrictions, they travel back and forth from the island to the mainland. This circular migration affects their acculturation pattern, acquisition of proficiency in English, and, in the case of children, school continuity (see Diaz & Draguns, 1990; Zavala, 1994). Puerto Ricans have also been treated as a homogeneous group, yet there exist among them differences in socioeconomic standards, acculturation, migration patterns and color that have not been studied. For example, the 1990 Census shows that 14 percent of Hispanic adults living in Massachusetts have completed college (Sege, 1992). How do the children of college educated Puerto Ricans, who do not face the material hardships of the

culture of poverty, yet are treated by many unknowing strangers as if they do, develop? Indeed, to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that separate the influence of poverty from that of ethnic factors on normal development and health of Hispanic/Latino populations (Surgeon General's National Hispanic/Latino Initiative, 1993).

A neglected source of heterogeneity is the role "color" plays in the lives of Puerto Rican children on the mainland. Fitzpatrick notes that,

> *Nothing is so complicating to the Puerto Ricans in their effort to adjust to American life as the problem of color. They represent the first group ever to come to the United States in large numbers with a tradition of widespread intermingling and intermarriage of people of different color (1987, p.104).*

In acknowledging the complexity of the relationship among race, color, culture, and class in Puerto Rico, we do not mean to suggest an absence of race or color prejudice. Rather, what we suggest is that in Puerto Rico the relationship between race and prejudice is moderated by color, culture, and class much more so and in different ways than is typical in the U.S. mainland.

In addition to the absence of the type of racial segregation found on the mainland, Fitzpatrick goes on to observe that, on the island, Puerto Rican identity is not based on race or color even though Puerto Ricans have commonly used words which denote different skin color tones. Rather, there is a complex relationship between race, color, culture and class such that an upper class person with dark skin can be referred to and treated as a "white" person (1987, p. 105). Similarly, Rodriguez (1989) observes that Hispanics in general and Puerto Ricans in particular have a concept of race that is as much social and cultural as it is racial. She writes,

> *In speaking of speech, dress norms, attitudes and other important criteria of status..., Puerto Ricans will say quite often "he or she is White" or "but that's so White." Whites have become a cultural group (1989, p.73).*

Lastly, most of the existing literature views Hispanic youth as problematic. Literature searches reveal repeated calls for researchers to incorporate into their studies specific stress factors such as racism, prejudice, oppression, minority status, migration, ethnicity and color, which directly or indirectly encourages a deficit-model approach. Indeed, in Massachusetts, Hispanic youth have high rates of somatic and psychosomatic complaints (Walker, 1987) as well as the highest teen pregnancy rate (Cruz, 1990). Puerto Rican children are also handicapped by lower

birth weight, poorer growth and nutritional status, chronic iron deficiency and elevated lead levels (Surgeon Generals National Hispanic and Latino Initiative, 1993). However, not all, not even a majority, exhibit these characteristics. Rather, they exhibit higher rates than whites. Labeled as a high risk population, Hispanic youth are the target of social services designed to address their problems. However, they have not been the target of basic research designed to understand who they are both in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. The goal of the present studies is to help fill this gap in our understanding of the lives of Puerto Rican youth on the mainland.

Brief Description of the Projects

Both projects are grounded in a cultural-ecological approach adapted from Brofenbrenner (1977, 1979) and Ogbu (1981) where we see a child raised in a family, living in a neighborhood, attending school, surrounded by peers and a minority community which is, in turn, embedded in the larger majority culture. These contexts have an influence on and are, in turn, influenced by the youth. The contexts are subject to change over time and also with migration to the mainland and back to the island.

Migration is an example of one of the mechanisms through which larger majority culture has an influence on Puerto Ricans. As a consequence of migration, Puerto Ricans "become" minority group members which can make them vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice, both actual and anticipated. When they migrate to the mainland, Puerto Ricans are confronted with a social system where race is a primary component of one's identity. On the mainland race distinctions tend to be reduced to two groups: White and non-White, where non-White is commonly understood to be Black. This situation confronts Puerto Ricans on the mainland with a choice to blend in with the Whites, if they are light skinned, to blend in with African Americans if they are dark skinned, or to insist on a separate Hispanic/Latino identity (Rodriguez, 1989). On the other hand, being a Spanish-speaking group can set Puerto Ricans apart from the majority White population, even if they are light skinned. Mainland U.S. society's distinctions between minorities and Whites has led many light-skinned Puerto Ricans to joke that they used to be white

but they took a plane ride and became a person of color.

The Adolescent Study

The adolescent study, which is in its second year of operation, will follow 150 Puerto Rican boys and 150 girls and their primary caretakers for a period of three years. They are 13 and 14 years old at the beginning of the study and are recruited from three different SES levels. Fifty boys and fifty girls come from welfare recipient families, and an equal number from working class families and another third from a middle class group. Interviews are done face-to-face by specially trained bilingual/bicultural interviewers, the majority of whom are Puerto Ricans.

The adolescent study centers on self-identity formation (including ethnic identity) and transformation of parental ties. Special attention is given to self-worth, family values, acculturation, exposure to discrimination and prejudice and their implications for mental health. The interview protocol also contains items on physical health, risk taking behaviors, sexuality, tobacco, alcohol and drug use, violence and perception of safety.

Besides the face-to-face interviews with the adolescents and their primary care providers, an ethnographic study of the school and the community will be done to ascertain the presence of minority stores, teachers, role models, community resources, etc. Of special interest in the ethnographic study is a survey of the receptivity of the neighborhood toward Puerto Ricans which will be discussed below as one of the newly created measures.

The School-aged Child Study

The study of school-aged children, "The Social Context of Puerto Rican Child Health and Growth," has started on October 1, 1994. It is a five year longitudinal project which will follow 150 girls and 150 boys of Puerto Rican origin and their primary care-takers from three different socioeconomic groups. At the beginning of the study, the children will be in grades first, second and third.

Components of healthy development to be examined include physical health, self-esteem, school performance and behavioral adjustment (mental health). Special emphasis will be placed on

the influence of migration, racism and prejudice on the healthy development of children. Child variables of interest are subjective perception of color, perception of social support, coping strategies and perception of safety at school. The family variables to be examined include socio-economic status, parent's job stress, racial identification, family structure, parental depression, acculturation, home environment, family values, sex roles, and parenting styles.

Results to date and Discussion

A large part of the first year has been spent in developing instruments and training interviewers. We selected instruments to measure the constructs we proposed to study: identity formation with a specific emphasis on ethnic identity, relationships with parents with an emphasis on autonomy and attachment, peer relationships, family values, acculturation, experience with discrimination, self-worth, social supports, parenting style, health and risk taking behaviors, perceptions of the neighborhood, influence of migration, and prejudice on health and development.

As researchers working with a minority population, we were faced with the choice of using standardized instruments in order to compare our results with other population groups or creating new instruments which we believed would be more valid for use with Puerto Ricans. We went about this task by examining available instruments in all content areas of interest to the project, particularly those which had been used with Hispanic populations. The instruments we selected were examined in focus groups of Puerto Rican adults and adolescents. For many of the constructs we selected, the focus group feedback did not indicate revisions. However, we saw that measures of acculturation and family functioning required major adaptations.

Acculturation. Growing from discussions with focus groups of Puerto Rican adolescents and their parents, we have developed a theoretical approach to measuring acculturation as composed of four components: behavior, preferences, competence and identity (see Tropp, et. al., 1994). Our instrument incorporates some of the concepts addressed in the Short Acculturation Scale (Marin, Sabogal, et. al., 1987) and in the Behavioral Acculturation Scale (Szapocznik, Scopetta, & Kurtines, 1978), concerning language use, cultural practices, and social interaction.

The instrument has items measuring behaviors (e.g., "in general, what languages(s) **do** you speak?") We assess one's ability to function in either Anglo or Puerto Rican environments and one's preferred cultural behaviors (e.g., "in general, what language(s) **can** you speak?") We measure preferences by such items as, "when you have a choice, what language(s) do you **prefer** to speak?" Additionally, our measure includes items measuring cultural identification, e.g., "which culture are you proud of being a part of?" Pilot testing with 251 Hispanic/Latino respondents has yielded a reliability of .94 for our 29-item acculturation scale both for its Spanish and English versions.

Family Functioning and Values. Pre-testing in focus groups with adolescents and with parents revealed domains not covered by the existing instruments designed to measure family functioning and values. For example, both the McMaster Family Assessment Device (Epstein, Baldwin & Bishop, 1983) and the Hispanic Familism Scale (Sabogal, et. al., 1987) do not adequately measure a distinguishing characteristic of Puerto Rican families which is strong emotional attachment between parents and children accompanied by clearly defined intergenerational lines of authority. This strong emotional attachment has led Canino and Canino to characterize the Puerto Rican family as "normally enmeshed" (1980, p.536). The tradition of family therapy in U.S. majority culture, out of which grew the notion of "enmeshment," defines enmeshment in terms of a breakdown of generational boundaries in the family [see for example, Minuchin (1974) and Minuchin, Rosman, and Baker (1978)]. However, among Puerto Ricans, in contrast to the U.S. majority culture, emotional "enmeshment" occurs in the context of clear generational boundaries.

This subtle difference between the "normal" enmeshment of the Puerto Rican family and the "problematic" enmeshment in U.S. majority families, which was highlighted in the focus group discussions, have led us to develop additional questions which differentiate between intense emotional attachments and intergenerational boundaries. Adaptations of the two original family instruments have resulted in a measure which we have labeled Hispanic Family Values. It has been pilot tested on 217 Hispanic/Latino respondents in the U.S. The scale we have developed is

composed of two dimensions. One dimension is very similar to the familism construct defined and measured by Sabogal, et. al., (1987). It contains items indicative of placing a high value on family closeness and obligations to immediate and extended family. The second dimension is comprised of items which fall along a dimension of formality/distance versus informality/warmth. Both subscales have adequate internal consistency reliability scores (.85).

Our search for instruments did not yield any which were suitable for measuring perceived discrimination among Puerto Ricans, a children's subjective sense of their color for Hispanic populations, and neighborhood receptivity toward Puerto Ricans. We created these measures.

Perceived discrimination. To study perceived exposure to discrimination and prejudice, we have developed a measure asking adolescents and caregivers whether they have experienced discrimination and prejudice which they attribute to being Puerto Rican in the following arenas: in the neighborhood, at school, while shopping, while looking for a job, and on the job. We, then, also ask them if they fear being discriminated against in these places. We have also added items pertaining to personal feelings associated with discrimination and past discrimination experiences. This measure is different from others used in the past since it takes into consideration both experienced and anticipated discrimination. That is, it also takes into account not only the fact of being discriminated, but also the feelings it generates and the posterior impact of these on one's on-going social interactions.

Child's perceptions of color. Puerto Rican children migrating to the United States are confronted by a culture which is highly conscious of racial distinctions on the basis of skin color. Often, this distinction is forced into a white/non-white dichotomy, which fails to recognize the diverse range of skin tones seen and named by Puerto Ricans. It is therefore imperative to understand Puerto Rican children's development in the context of the color they assign themselves. As part of the study of school-aged children's health and growth, we are in the process of devising an instrument for assessing children's subjective sense of their color. We start out with a sheet with human figures of varying sizes in silhouettes, we ask children to color themselves, utilizing Crayola's Multicultural set of crayons (which includes varying shades of brown, tan, black and

white). This technique allows us to have an objective record of children's subjective sense of their color. We, then, explore their choice of color with follow-up questions concerning attitudes toward their chosen shade, and the shades they would most like to be. The measure also incorporates interviewers' judgement of the child's color. We have successfully pre-tested this method of assessing color identity with children in Puerto Rico and are currently validating the instrument with Puerto Rican children residing in the mainland of the United States.

Receptivity of the social environment toward Puerto Ricans. One of our proposed sampling strategies of going door-to-door to screen in Puerto Rican families affords a unique opportunity to measure attitudes toward Puerto Ricans in the neighborhoods in which they live. We have devised a protocol to be used when going from door-to-door in a neighborhood to be administered to one of the adults who lives at each address. This instrument is intended to yield information on the attitude of the neighborhood towards Puerto Ricans as well as serve as a screening tool for study participants.

Translation. In both studies respondents are be given an option to be interviewed in Spanish or in English. For creating Spanish versions of standardized English instruments we have used the back translation method. In this method, one person will translate from English into Spanish and a different person translates from the Spanish version back into English. Discrepancies in the translated versions are dealt with through "decentering" -- a process of several iterations, each time decentering the instrument away from the idiosyncracies of the source language which, in this case, is English (see Brislin, 1980).

Through trial and error we came to the conclusion that this method, while appropriate for translating materials from a source language, was not suitable for creating new items. When new items were being created, starting out with an English version unnecessarily constrained the Spanish version. Since a bilingual/bicultural research team was constructing the new instruments, we abandoned the back translation/decentering method. We now utilize the dual-focus approach in which we develop a concept and generate questions simultaneously in both languages. In this dual-focus approach, constraints of Spanish are as likely to influence choice of final wording as the

constraints of English. Using this method, we found that we preserved the underlying content in each language with greater validity. This new method of item generation in two languages has been tested in focus groups and pilot studies and has produced highly satisfactory results. For example, correlations between individual acculturation scores on the Spanish and English versions among a subset of the sample who completed both the English and Spanish versions of the acculturation scale (N=36) is .98.

Summary and Conclusions

Even though the two studies are in their beginning stages, we are presenting them because of their uniqueness and contribution to the study of health and development of Puerto Ricans growing up in the mainland USA. What makes these studies culturally sensitive is a combination of several features.

First of all, these studies are being carried out by a multidiciplinary team composed primarily of Hispanics to study the behavior of fellow Hispanics. The cultural sensitivity the Hispanic researchers bring has informed all aspects of the study design and implementation. We strongly believe that the cultural sensitivity of these two projects emanates from the inclusion of Hispanic researchers at all levels of this endeavor, but primarily at the decision-making level at the top.

Secondly, they are longitudinal studies that view Puerto Rican adolescents, children and their parents as they are and not from a deficit model as seen before. Thus, we study both positive and negative coping skills.

Furthermore, we have made an effort to include in the studies areas which are pertinent to Puerto Ricans and other minorities and have been previously neglected in other research. Examples are: self and ethnic identity formation, acculturation, and color and effects of migration, prejudice and racism on health and development.

The theoretical model of these studies is a socio-ecological one which takes into account children and adolescents' surroundings (family, peers, school, neighborhood, and the larger society). Studying the social milieu in which the children and adolescents are imbedded makes our approach and instruments culturally sensitive to specific problems that minority populations face such as racism, oppression and prejudice.

The sampling strategy stratifies the Puerto Rican populations into three SES groups, instead of treating them as a homogeneous entity. Thus, we will be able to extract what is Puerto Rican (that is, ethnic) from the effects of poverty.

Instrument development is also unique since some instruments have been adapted to the culture being studied and not merely translated and new ones have been created. In creating new instruments we abandoned the traditional "back translating" method in favor of the "dual focus" method which conserves the context in each language with greater precision and clarity.

Needless to say, the elements we have introduced in the study -- level of acculturation, family values versus school values, migration patterns, effects of racism, oppression and prejudice -- will have a great impact on development and physical and mental health which we will not only measure once, but will follow during a three year period during critical parts of the life cycle (i.e. childhood and mid-adolescence).

It is expected that at the end of five years these studies will make contributions to understanding what it is like to grow up Puerto Rican in the mainland of the USA and how that experience manifests itself in physical and mental health, normal development, school performance and high risk behavior. Hopefully, we would have also learned enough about the positive coping skills of those that succeed, so that our health, education and social policy plans and policies can be based on both the positive and negative results that the experience of being Puerto Rican in the USA brings with it.

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